

Shopping in Moscow Store Hard on Nerves

By ANN LANDERS
(Ann Landers writes the most widely read human relations column in America. Mrs. Landers has just returned from a trip to the Soviet Union. This is the eighth in a series of articles on her experiences.)

MOSCOW—A visit to the GUM department store is a nerve-shattering, toe-crushing, rib-jabbing experience that no American tourist should miss. This is where you really get the feel of the people. You feel them on your feet, on your back and on your head.

I interviewed the director of GUM, Vladimir Georgevitch, a keen-eyed, personable man who has one of the top jobs in Moscow. He speaks of the store with great affection and seemed delighted to answer my questions.

GUM, according to Georgevitch, is the largest retail store in the world. It does a volume of \$1 million a day. No other store in the Soviet Union remotely compares in size. The initials GUM stands for Government Universal Store. GUM, of course, is state-owned and the profits go to Moscow's municipal government. The store employs 6000 people and it's open seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. GUM is more than a department store. It is a thermometer of Moscow's economic temperature. From what I saw, Russia has a high fever.

I VISITED GUM three times. I didn't believe it. Never have I seen so many pay so much for so little.

The prices are outrageous by our standards with the exception of books, school supplies and some fabrics. The quality of most of the merchandise was shocking in relation to the price tags. A plastic purse that would sell for about 98 cents in Kresge's was marked 89 rubles (\$8.90). Women were clawing and shoving for a place in line to buy these purses. There were lines at every counter. There is always a mob at the front door before the store opens, and at closing time customers must be pushed out the doors.

"THE SALES girls can't possibly take this punishment 12 hours a day," I told Eleonora, my interpreter. "They'd be ready for a rest home in a month."

"There are two shifts," she said. "Most girls work only six hours, although some work a double shift for double pay three days a week. The girls rather enjoy the excitement

and they get a percentage of everything they sell. In America you call it commission."

"Is a job in GUM considered desirable?"

"VERY DESIRABLE. Most of these employes have only secondary education (no college). It is easier than shoveling rock." (In this reporter's opinion, it's close.)

The sales girls who served us were pleasant and friendly, although they dripped with perspiration and they were harassed and tried. Each counter could have used double the personnel. The hat counter employed four girls and a cashier. Forty people were waiting to be served.

Most of the sales girls were aged 25 to 50. They wore printed dresses (like our house aprons), no make-up and had very little style. Two girls wore bedroom slippers behind the counter. One wore no shoes, just bobby socks.

ALMOST EVERY sales person who smiled needed dental work. It was difficult to become accustomed to the Russians' stainless steel teeth. Even the most loyal supporters of "the system" admitted Russian dentistry is "behind."

"The women who came here from European countries have Russian-type dentist dentistry," my interpreter commented. "Americans seem to have the best-cared-for teeth in the world."

I noticed (not without embarrassment) that the salespeople were especially courteous to Americans. "Amerikansky turisti, pajalosta," they would call out. ("Please make way for the American tourists.") The Russians did not object to surrendering their place in line. I indicated I was in no hurry and would wait my turn, but they cheerfully said, "Nyet, nyet," and insisted I accept the courtesy.

AT A TOY counter a sweet-faced, grandmotherly peasant woman stood behind me. She fingered by silk dress with her work-worn fingers. "Cra-see-voiya," she said. ("Pretty.") I acknowledged the compliment in my inadequate Russian. She beamed.

She wanted to see what type of petticoat I had on that caused my wide skirt to flare. The friendly woman turned the hem of my dress, and seeing the stiff crinolined petticoat she sighed, "Privilkah-tinkee!" ("Attractive.") At that moment, a severe-looking matron lifted the old woman's

hands off my skirt. In an admonishing tone she said, "You shouldn't touch people. It is rude. People don't like it."

"IT IS ALL right. I don't mind," I said, patting the old woman's hand. With that, she put her arms around my shoulders and gave me a kiss on the cheek. "Awchen dawbree," she said ("you are very kind") and disappeared into the crowd.

The toy department was fascinating. I saw the same type of toys we have in America, but the quality was generally poor. Airplanes, tanks, guns, dolls, stuffed animals, and games were the major items. Most of the dolls were made of flammable celluloid. (A law prohibiting the manufacture of such dolls was passed in the United States several years ago.)

The TV department was mobbed. A 10-inch set sells for \$80. The government sees that TV is within the financial reach of most families. It is a superb propaganda weapon. Almost every Russian home has a set.

THE LINGERIE department (nylon nightgowns, \$25) had fewer customers than most other counters although they were lined up here, too.

In this department I had the best chance to examine the fixtures and the showcases. Although GUM was opened in 1950, the store looks about 40 years old. The plaster and tile is cracked. The showcases are clumsy and old-fashioned. The cash registers brought back memories.

A glass dome that runs the length of the store gave me the feeling I was in Demmler's greenhouse in Eau Claire, Wis. The sun beating down through the glass roof created a bathhouse humidity. There is no air-conditioning.

I asked if GUM had elevators. "What for," I was told. "The store has only four floors." There were no escalators although Russia's subways have streamlined escalators that move twice as fast as ours.

A PUBLIC address system frequently blasts out announcements that can be heard throughout the store. "If you have lost your child or shopping companion, please go to the main fountain and get together."

"Will the person who left her packages on the corset counter please claim them in the lost-and-found department on the second floor."

Several wall phones are located at key points for the convenience of the customers. These phones are connected with a central operator in the store. A customer who cannot find an item picks up the phone, reports her position and is directed.

I TESTED IT. "I am near the leather goods department

on the first floor and I can't find bedspreads," I told the operator. "Proceed to the center aisle and turn right," was the instruction.

GUM has no charge accounts and no installment plan. Every transaction is cash. There are no refunds or exchanges. Gift-wrapping is unheard of; in fact, only recently do they wrap at all. Many shoppers carry bags and put the merchandise into the bag with no wrapping.

I asked that my merchandise be put in a box, if possible. The box was neither glued or stapled. It fell apart before I got to the hotel. Only the heavy twine kept the merchandise from falling out.

AT THAT MOMENT we passed the men's clothing department. There were three lines, six deep. "How much is a man's suit?" I asked. "About \$150," Eleonora, my interpreter, replied.

"And how much is the average salary for a worker?" I asked. "About \$100 a month."

"This means a man must work 45 days to pay for a suit of clothes. In America a suit of clothes can be bought for less than half of the average man's weekly check."

"You Americans and your crazy arithmetic," she fired back. "I hear this argument every day. You all want to translate rubles into American dollars and it is impossible. In Russia, a man's taxes are about 4 per cent of his salary. No person in the Soviet Union, regardless of his income, pays more than 13 per cent taxes."

"RENTS ARE 4 per cent of a person's wages. Medical and dental care is free. The subway costs 5 cents, a haircut is 20 cents. Telephones are \$2.50 a month and calls are unlimited. Vacations—two and four weeks—at a summer resort are paid for by the factories of the workers. Education is free. Almost every Russian family has two wage earners."

"A man's suit costs \$150—so what? Our other expenses are so low it is no hardship. I started to interrupt her but she wasn't finished."

"There is no need to save money in Russia. The government pensions take care of our old age."

Since we were letting our hair down, I asked Eleonora, "Why do most Russians who appear in public look so down-at-heel? That woman (I pointed to a shopper) wears a ragged scarf around her head. The buttons are off her coat. Her shoes are tied on with twine. Yet she's buying her three children ice cream cones and they cost 20 cents each."

"MOST OF THE ragged ones are peasants. They are not poor. They just don't know how to dress for the city. Are your farmers any different in America?"



STERLING MOSSMAN . . . Famous star of Hawaiian night clubs makes his first West Coast appearance with a three-night engagement, Nov. 19-20-21, at The Polynesian Restaurant here, highlighting the second anniversary celebration of the exotic dining establishment.

Native Style Thanksgiving Dinners Set at Polynesian

Reservations for native-style Thanksgiving dinners are now being taken at The Polynesian in Torrance.

Following the traditional island ceremonies at the "imu" pit, beginning at 1 p.m. on Thanksgiving day, the tropical establishment will feature four full-course holiday dinners at \$4.

The Polynesian, however, will open at noon for cocktails. The complete dinner entrees include Kalua Turkey, Kalua Chicken, Kalua Ham and Kalua Pig.

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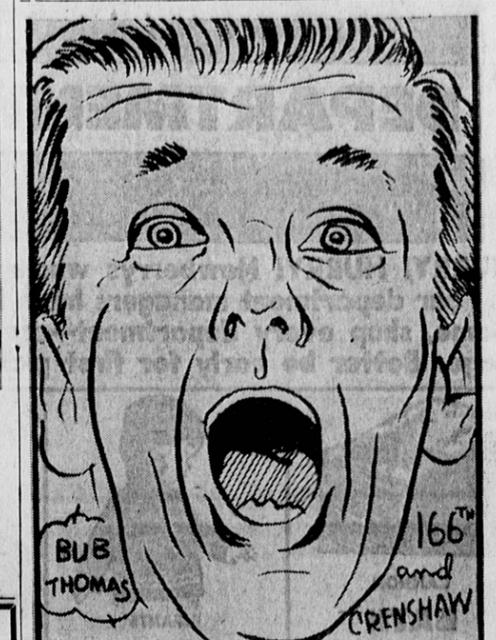
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New Palleys Store Slated For Torrance; Work Starts

Groundbreaking ceremonies were conducted recently and construction is now under way on the fifth store of the Palley chain, a \$400,000 pre-cast concrete panel structure at Hawthorne and Sepulveda.

Most modern in every respect, its entire 33,000 square feet will afford shoppers the most complete and unique selection of products in a pleasant air conditioned atmosphere.

Store engineering to assure the utmost ease of shopping been carried out by the nationally known Bulman Corp. Architects are Paul J. Tolen

& Assoc.; contractors are De Bay & Howard.
A 400-car offstreet parking area is provided, store officials state.



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